



NEWS RELEASE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Virtual Flag starts first war

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KIRTLAND Air Force Base, N.M.—The U.S. Air Force's first "Virtual Flag" exercise that provides various command and control aircrews the ability to fully integrate with other command and control, intelligence and "shooter" platforms in a wartime environment has recently concluded.

More than 50 participants and 80 event controllers and support personnel from across the Air Force, the New Mexico Army National Guard and the Iowa and Kansas Air National Guard worked together here at the Theater Aerospace Command and Control Facility's new building and at seven distributed locations. The exercise provided a massive simulated theater-level war to practice command and control operations

"Command and control is the ability to direct aircraft and units in any given situation," said Lt. Col. James "Boomer" Henry, TACCSF commander. "Our unit is uniquely qualified to provide and bring together the necessary equipment and people from across the Air Force to provide a simulation that is large enough and real enough that it provides realistic training."

"Simulations at home stations for the different C2 platforms tend to be 'canned' events that everyone knows and aren't easily changed," said Capt. Kris Ecker, TACCSF program manager for the exercise. "At our facility we have the ability to combine the dynamic interaction between the different platforms with a robust scenario that can be changed and adjusted on the fly."

Some of the platforms involved in Desert Pivot include: the 552nd Air Control Wing, Tinker AFB using AWACS; 93rd ACW, Robins AFB using Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System, also known as JSTARS; the 19th and 20th Special Operations Squadrons, Hurlburt Field flying MH-53 Pavlow helicopters and MC-130E Combat Talons; the Nellis Combined Air Operations Center, Nellis AFB conducting Time Critical Targeting; the 13th Intelligence Squadron, Beale AFB, using unmanned aerial vehicles; and the Air Force Information Warfare Center, Kelly AFB providing "Red" integrated air defense systems.

In addition to platforms that are already being used in today's Air Force, the TACCSF also integrates future assets such as the Airborne Laser platform and the Military Space Plane.

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Virtual Flag

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“Because the training here is done in a simulated environment, we can smoothly integrate the new and potential platforms for the Air Force,” said Lt. Col. Henry. “If we start practicing today with what we will be using in the future, we are able to first figure out how to best use the new platforms and then to use them to their full potential when they come on line.”

The exercise scenario begins on “Day 3” of hostilities in a region and it includes three primary “stressor” events that are the main objectives of the training. In the three events the exercise participants must extract a Special Operations Team, target ballistic missile sites and launchers, and rescue a downed airman. Throughout all these events there is a simulated massive air war taking place.

It is the dynamic air and ground war that helps with the realism of the situation, said Capt. Ecker. For example, “in a real world flying training mission, an AWACS crew might be able to occasionally connect with a JSTARS crew and the returns they get on their radar are limited with little coordination between the platforms. Virtual Flag creates the necessary environment to fully flex their command and control capabilities.

“For the special operators in the exercise, while they are conducting a search and rescue mission they have this massive air and ground war going on around them. While they are focused on getting the downed airman, they need to be aware of what’s happening and coordinate the removal of any threats. We give them those added stressors that they’d have to deal with in a real situation,” said Capt. Ecker.

Virtual Flag provides the interaction between aircrews all the way from mission planning to execution and through the debrief using a full-threat environment, said Capt. Ecker. It offered them the rare opportunity to work hand-in-hand with numerous other platforms. The learning curve was exponential for all the players.

There are plans in the future to make Virtual Flag into a quarterly event like Red Flag at Nellis AFB, Nev. and Blue Flag at Hurlburt Field, Fla. Eventually the Virtual Flags may even become a part of the bigger Blue Flags.

Virtual Flag is in the next echelon below Blue Flag, according to Capt. Ecker, because the warfighter-in-the-loop interactions focus on the command and control crews and how they perform their mission. Normally a Blue Flag exercise concentrates on the upper level management of running an entire air war.

And while Red Flag is primarily focused on the pilots and on large-scale tactical battles, Virtual Flag encompasses everything from ground ballistic missile training to controlling F-15 pilots flying simulators.

The Theater Aerospace Command and Control Simulation Facility is run by Detachment 4 of the Air Force Command and Control Training and Innovation Group (AFC2TIG), Hurlburt Field, Fla. The AFC2TIG is the focal point for integration of all aerospace campaign C2 processes, including rapid technology assessment on behalf of the warfighter. AFC2TIG possesses the unique ability to test, exercise, experiment, and train all elements of C2: the people, processes, and systems.